Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group

Appearances of Beasts and Mystery-Cats in France
Author(s): Véronique Campion-Vincent
Source: *Folklore*, Vol. 103, No. 2 (1992), pp. 160-183
Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of Folklore Enterprises, Ltd.
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1260888
Accessed: 16/06/2014 00:48

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Folklore Enterprises, Ltd. and *Taylor & Francis, Ltd.* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Folklore.*

http://www.jstor.org

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Appearances of Beasts and Mystery-Cats in France

VÉRONIQUE CAMPION-VINCENT

THE research presented here corresponds to a study of media and fieldwork conducted in 1989-1990. It extends my research concerning Viper-Release Stories started at the end of 1987.[1] Its aim is the description, analysis and interpretation of appearances of unknown beasts and mystery cats in France, taking their factual and symbolic dimensions into account.

These appearances are linked to social resistance towards the new French policies of nature conservation insofar as these policies lead to measures affecting sensitive wildlife animal species.

This resistance is especially expressed through, firstly, the passionate assertion that protected birds (seagulls, buzzards or herons) are proliferating harmfully. Protests are especially numerous and vivid for herons. Here are a few examples. In an article about the region of Sologne published in 1989 in an outdoor magazine *Grands Reportages,* it is said that their population has increased tenfold in the past ten years and that they decimate the fishes of Sologne's numerous ponds because of their huge and uncontrollable appetite. Any pond owner will readily explain to you what personal trick he uses to keep them at bay while remaining within the limits of the law that protects these birds (a transparent nylon thread circling the pond is said to be a good repellent). In October 1990, vehement protests by a fish farmer in the South-East marshland of Les Dombes (département of Ain—to locate the quoted départements, see map on p. 166) who asserted that he was overrun by herons, almost swamped the ecological early Saturday morning radio programme *Fréquence buissonnière.*

Secondly, there are accusations (equally passionate) of deliberate releases of predators that lead to their pullulation: mainly vipers and foxes, but also big cats.

For vipers, assertions of organised releases, carried out from aircraft, have persisted since the mid-seventies. Accusing first serum-producing labs, then nature protectors and officials, these stories are connected to changes in the practices which exploited these strongly tabooed animals and have been reinforced by the 1979 decrees that outlawed the trade in them. After the collective emotions of the early eighties, the phenomenon has entered a more diffuse and stable phase, but it is still vigorous, and organised viper-releases are regarded as true facts by several diversified sections of the French population. Three independent studies of the phenomenon have been conducted.[2]

For foxes the tales are unstructured, but now and then one hears that people reintroduce them. Thus, after having exposed viper-release practices, an elderly woman farmer declared in November 1986 to social anthropologist Solange Pinton in Creuse: 'They put back plenty of broken boxes of vipers. They talked about it on the radio. It's disgusting. It's the same with foxes: hunters destroy them, then bring back whole lorryloads of them.' In autumn 1990 an acquaintance living in rural Mayenne told me that in his village a truck coming from Germany had been discovered overturned after a traffic accident, 'loaded with foxes'.

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

The appearances of mysterious beasts and large felines have developed and evolved in the last ten years in reaction to the new policies of protecting wild fauna, and especially to the reintroduction of predator species, which, in the case of lynxes, have caused major controversies. The official reintroduction of lynxes in the Vosges has caused less problems then their expansion from neighbouring Switzerland—in which lynxes were reintroduced in the seventies—into the mountains of Alps and Jura, especially in sheep-raising Ain. However, I shall not discuss extensively the case of lynxes or the situation in Ain, which deserve a specific study.

Appearances of beasts and mystery cats are also part of rumours and contemporary legends. A small part: these appearances constitute individual occurrences which remain unknown to vast sectors of the French population, and animal-release rumours are far less noticeable than the rumours concerning the daily preoccupations of the French—food or insecurity—or elaborating on their stars and celebrities. They constitute a series of cases and incidents that range from the individual and local—an unusual isolated sighting that is not reported outside the family circle—to a case of national importance such as the Vosges Beast in 1977.

These are ambiguous phenomena, that arouse argument about their real or fantastic nature. Animals judged abnormal are seen, heard, damage livestock; they leave traces, spoor, hair, excreta that cause passionate controversies amongst specialists; if the case is judged important search parties—at times numerous and calling up dozens of people—are organized against them; the local cafés are full of stories and testimonies concerning the topic of the moment; local and then national media devote articles and programmes to the case, and sometimes publish hazy pictures of the mysterious animal. A *flap* builds up. This slang term is used by the Forteans studying anomalies to describe cycles of agitation with various causes that develop in symbiosis between a local public and the media:

> A flap is an unusual, dramatic burst of excitement centred upon some anomalous and possibly threatening report which generated others of the same variety. It is characterized by intense public and media excitement during which a number of separate incidents become collated in a series or cycle, the whole being more impressive (convincing, credible) than any of its parts.
>
> The theme of a flap may well be some aspect of the paranormal—UFOs, ghosts, witchcraft or lycanthropy. Conversely, it may focus upon a more quasi-tangible threat like an escaped wild animal or upon a mysterious psychopathic attacker.[3]

The case often ends up inconclusively; the damage stops, unusual sightings are no longer reported; it is an 'open' ending. Frequent in flaps and other media mysteries, this type of ending is largely due to the generalized weariness of the participants:

> Then . . . the whole thing subsides . . . At this stage the phenomenon, however believable it may have previously been, is no longer credible. One might suspect that the deflation of the flap owes as much to the fact that participants have become bored with it as to any rational process. . . . The ambiguity may not actually be removed, but the official explanation suggesting that it has been removed provides timely and valid grounds for the participants not to bother themselves with resolving what they have helped to create.[4]

If an unusual animal is caught or killed and this coincides with the end of the damage, the case is concluded and shut. Generally qualified authorities conclude that the anomaly can be explained by the presence of a stray domestic animal (most often a dog) and by an overinterpretative public. However, these conclusions are widely rejected by the

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

local public affected by the case. Those who conduct research upon these isolated cases or cycles conclude generally that the facts remain enigmatic and that sure conclusions are difficult to assert; as in most anomalies, an element of mystery remains. It also appears that these abnormal events lead to a collective interpretative process that deserves to be studied as much as the facts themselves.

This study is mainly sociological, and is less concerned with the identification of predators than with the interest their sighting, their damage or the discovery of their remains arouses. It is therefore purposely that I have chosen the imprecise, but strongly connotated, terms of 'beasts' (a word that in French usage implies aggression and can equally apply to wild felines or to canines) and of 'cats'. For the general public, beasts and cats are part of the same set—with fuzzy boundaries but raising related feelings of fascination and anxiety—of animals that evoke legends and tales of long ago.

GENERAL SURVEY AND TYPOLOGY

The table given as Appendix A presents by date the main Beast cases in France since 1945. A typology of these cases can be established. It shows:

A. closed cases (i.e. ending in the capture or death of the animal or identification of its remains) that concern:

A.1 or A.2 wild wolves, surviving in France or coming from the neighbouring countries in which they still survive. For cases preceding 1968, these are the hypotheses presented by de Beaufort, who has compiled most of the data in his study of the ecology of wolves in France.[5]

A.3 domestic or captive wolves, escaped, abandoned or deliberately released.

It is in 1968 that this hypothesis appears in de Beaufort. In that year two stray wolves, a male and a female, were shot at two months' interval in the same département, South-West Landes, in a scarcely populated region of pine forest. According to de Beaufort, this case is the only one that might point to a serious undercover project of reintroduction, since a couple was involved.[6] Several articles soon alluded to this possibility,[7] which is still often evoked orally today by scientists as well as in circles of friends of wildlife. I have personally heard the deed attributed to several notorious friends of the wolves or to a mysterious 'Green Hand' league. Four years later, in 1972, when two wolves appeared in Eastern Seine & Marne and Aisne not far from Paris (the first one being captured, the second one killed after serious damage to flocks at a few months' interval), the journalists talked of covert deliberate releases in the cases of the Meaux Wolf or the Cramaille Beast. However, apart from the 1968 exception, domestic or captive wolves caught or shot are generally animals that have escaped accidentally.

I have ignored the rather frequent cases of lions or other large felines kept as pets or captives, often living in urbanised areas, whose escape was regularly reported by the press even in the early fifties. In these cases, the escape is reported and the animal found in a short time.

A.4 confusion with dogs. An animal thought to be a wolf has been shot, but the study of its remains show it was a dog. Case reported by the press in 1963, by de Beaufort in 1981.

B. Open cases, in which the animal remains mysterious. Their impact is very different if there are only sightings or if there are unexplained injuries to flocks, or again if there is a combination of sightings and damage.

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

In the open cases of the fifties the press articles located the incidents in a logical wild context remote from humans: it was in deep forests that gamekeepers, during very cold winters, spotted wolves. In 1954, several open cases followed the pursuit and death of a wolf that aroused considerable collective emotion in Isère and coincided with large search parties aimed at the female and two cubs that were supposed to accompany the shot male. Then in 1977 an important mysterious animal appeared. From February till November 1977, first on the Lorraine plateau near Rambervilliers and then in the highlands of the Bresse, the notorious Vosges Beast killed some 300 sheep and set the region and the nation in uproar. The summing-up of damage and expenses caused by the Vosges Beast is impressive:

> Victims in 31 farms: 289 sheep, 3 cows, 1 foal, 4 dogs, 38 wounded sheep, cured; 60 lost sheep, some found dead in spring 1978. Many wild animals: stags, deer, roebucks. Search parties: 26 involving 1,835 persons from April till January. 71 nights of guard. Cost of losses 500,000 francs (about £50,000).[8]

Many hypotheses were built up as to the exact nature of the Vosges Beast. It was often seen, and by many varied witnesses; it was even photographed. However, it was neither found nor caught, and disappeared mysteriously. The damage stopped on the 15th of November, as suddenly as it had started. At first, the creature's behaviour was that of an animal of domestic origin, not intimidated by its encounters with humans, not menacing towards those it met. After the drives and pursuits the animal became more elusive, and escaped with intelligence and a very sure instinct from the groups hunting it. Early on, this case attracted the attention of sociologists of rumour,[9] and is still routinely alluded to by passionate lovers of wildlife. It is a prototype of the release accusations launched nowadays whenever beasts and mystery cats are sighted.

An idea which was widespread at the time was that the Vosges Beast was a ferocious trained animal which its owner set upon flocks for his personal sadistic gratification. People talked about an animal acting under remote control, whose master used a high-frequency whistle, and which was transported by car to the sites of its evil deeds. The German industrialist who had just bought and reorganised the Verrières wood situated in the Rambervilliers forest (in which he had put up a fenced boar park, erected miradors and feeding points for deer, hired guards and ordered them to shoot stray dogs that wandered in his domain) was a favourite target of the first accusations. However, he easily exonerated himself when questioned by the gendarmes who had summoned him. In the articles of 1977 this hypothesis of the manipulated animal was given an equal importance to that of a feral but autonomous animal, perhaps a hybrid of dog and wolf. However, it is now the best known, because it has been promoted vigorously by groups of passionate lovers of wildlife. These groups have endorsed and publicised these theories of human manipulation which exonerate a wild (and therefore good) animal. For them aggression could only come from humans. Thus these authors state that the Beast caused damage mostly at weekends.[10] However, this assertion is unsupported by the latest book on the case, based on a thorough inquiry.[11]

A different atmosphere can be felt after 1980. Now the talk is of panthers, lions, pumas or lynxes, and the unusual animal sighted is more and more frequently considered as an escapee coming from a zoo or belonging to a neglectful private collector. The media often deplore that declarations of ownership are not compulsory for big cats owners who do not exhibit their animals.

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

In December 1982 it was a lionness that roamed the vicinity of Noth in the Creuse. The incident has been researched and a study published[12] that centres upon the cryptic discourses expressed through this occurrence, which belonged chiefly to the realm of fantasy but was fanned by rivalries between communist and rightist local newspapers and by local social conflicts, accusations being aimed at the local squire. A central hypothesis of the authors is that the appearance of the Noth Beast is in fact a parable about the dangers of the return of wilderness in this deserted area. Drawing on this study, Jean-Noël Kapferer[13] underlines the opposition between a rural world in economic decline and a world of nature protectors of urban origin mainly interested in an intact nature, considered as a haven for the stressed urbanite and as a repository of true values forgotten in cities.

A sub-type of mysterious animal that can be called recreative may be described when the sightings take place in a leisure area. In July 1982 it was the Pornic Panther, in a seaside resort (Loire-Atlantique), an escaped animal whose appearance led to jokes, scared campers, and kept the local media and the holiday-makers busy.[14] In July-August 1986, it was a black panther that was supposed to roam the dunes of the seaside resort of Le Touquet (Pas-de-Calais). Jean-Jacques Barloy[15] offers a plot interpretation of this incident, whose impact on the media far exceeds its importance, limited to a few furtive appearances; he judges it was 'a set-up arranged by high-level personalities with the help of lower-level executors (. . .) a political, ecological and developers' imbroglio' whose aim was to harm a developer unpopular with the local authorities. As at Pornic, the incident filled up the leisure time of holiday-makers, and was treated by the media largely as a fun event.

CASE STUDIES

The following cases have been studied in detail by Pierre Lagrange and myself in 1989/1990.[16]

Three of the four cases that took place in Var in 1987 correspond to our type B of open cases: the puma reported around St. Maximin in May caused no damage, while in the Esterel mountains in October and in Haut Var in November no animal was spotted, but there were injuries to sheep and goats, which were judged abnormal. In October at Tourtour a passer-by thought he saw a lioness and the gendarmes launched an inquiry. However, the animal was soon identified as an African dog belonging to a Tourtour inhabitant (type A.4), which closed the case, except for the passer-by who remained convinced.

Rejecting equally the *a priori* judgments such as that 'nothing happened' and the quest for symbolism such as a 'metaphor of savagery', Pierre Lagrange (who conducted his research with Jean-Louis Brodu) centred his study upon the interpretation systems of the witnesses, sheep and goat farmers, gendarmes, experts, journalists. He concentrates on describing the procedures of proof set up by those interviewed and their consequent deduction of the reality or unreality of the reported facts. He judges that it is impossible to distinguish elements linked to the imaginary and elements linked to a predetermined reality. The imaginary is part of the controversies that the protagonists sustain through the production of discourses that discuss nature as well as culture.

It is worth noting that in Var a local legend seems to have sprung up in the Esterel mountains: pumas were seen and hunted in vain in 1983 and in 1987, and in September

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

1989 a *Nice Matin* article related ironically how, misled by the remains of a big yellow dog spotted by a jogger, the population went the following day to hunt the mythical 'Esterel Lion'.

The first case I studied was that of the Fontan Wolf. It corresponds to our A.3 type, since the autopsy of the remains of this animal by the Museum of Natural History concluded that it came from a wolf farm in Italy that had been recently closed down. In the Alpes-Maritimes, serious and repeated damage to sheep flocks was reported during the spring of 1987 on the border of the National Park of Mercantour, in the Valleys of La Roya and Authion in the hinterland of Nice and Menton. These injuries resulted in an administrative invervention (organisation of search parties) that was not publicised. This was because farmers (who number 5,000, of which 4,000 are market gardeners) do not carry much weight compared to the interests of tourism in the département. A few lines were published in specialised agricultural newspapers, but there was no public concern till the 27th of December 1987, when the animal that caused the damage was shot on a Sunday morning near the mountain village of Fontan by a hunter chasing boars. This became a major news item which got full publicity, since its identification as a wolf was unequivocal. No mystery, no furtive sightings, but the remains of a wild beast—the immediate cessation of damage showed it was the cause—whose death was officially deplored by the Environment Department a few days later.

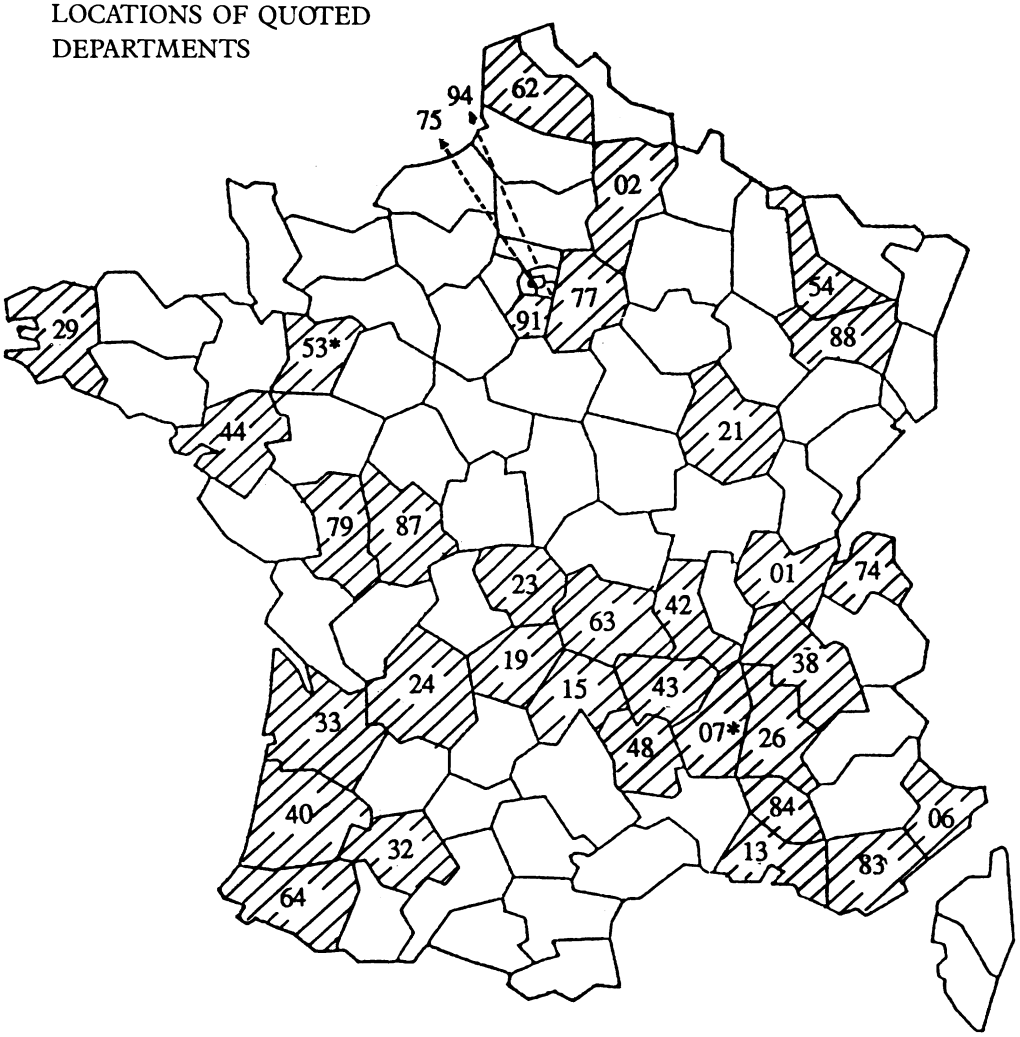
I have personally met several of the parties concerned: an engineer of the Agriculture and Forestry Department who had participated in the organisation of the search parties; representatives of the Hunters' Local Federation; the leader of ASPAS, an association of lovers of wildlife. This case is mostly mediatic, and I have analyzed it through a comprehensive press file built up during my fieldwork.

On the occasion of the Fontan Wolf case, the conflicts opposing the groups concerned with wildlife (hunters and ecologists) were openly expressed. ASPAS sued the hunter (a garage keeper of Nice, originally from Fontan, who was defended by the Hunters' Local Federation), but was dismissed and ordered to pay costs (an exceptional result, lawsuits being generally concluded in favour of these ecological associations). The press file relates this conflict, but also informs us of the reactions of a mainly urban public which wrote many letters to the media, openly hostile to hunters and indifferent to farmers, championing the poor wolf's cause and being highly sympathetic to the ecologists' arguments.

In the Drôme the 1988 cases I studied belong to our type B—open cases. There are several sightings, but practically no damage. Unusual animals were spotted in April near Mont-Ventoux on the border of Drôme and Vaucluse, then in July at Suze-la-Rousse. Depositions coming from the nearby village of Réauville—noted by the gendarmerie of Grignan at the beginning of December and confirmed by unusual spoor—led to an important administrative action: a temporary ban on hunting, immediately reported in the local newspapers. The damage remained minor, search parties and watches were unsuccessful, and two months later the Réauville Beast, also designated as a puma, had disappeared from the news. In April 1989 the expert report of Véronique Herrenschmidt, a specialist on lynxes sent to the spot by the National Hunting Office (ONC), concluded that these episodes were due to the temporary straying of a feline in Suze-la-Rousse in July and to that of a large mammal in the vicinity of Réauville from December 1988 till February 1989, 'the most plausible hypothesis being that of a big dog, of the mastiff type, whose hair would be slightly longer'.

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

LOCATIONS OF QUOTED DEPARTMENTS



*: departments only quoted in the text

01 Ain
02 Aisne (2 citations)
06 Alpes-Maritimes
07 Ardèche (*)
13 Bouches-du-Rhone
15 Cantal (2 citations)
19 Corrèze
21 Côte d'Or
23 Creuse
24 Dordogne
26 Drôme (3 citations)
29 Finistère
32 Gers (2 citations)
33 Gironde (2 citations)
38 Isère
40 Landes (2 citations)
42 Loire
43 Loire (Haute)
44 Loire-Atlantique (2 citations)
48 Lozère (3 citations)
53 Mayenne (*)
54 Meurthe-et-Moselle (2 citations)
62 Pas-de-Calais
63 Puy-de-Dôme
64 Pyrénées-Alantiques
74 Savoie (Haute)
75 Seine: Paris
77 Seine-et-Marne (2 citations)
79 Sèvres (Deux)
83 Var (7 citations)
84 Vaucluse
87 Vienne (Haute) (2 citations)
88 Vosges (3 citations)
91 Essonne
94 Val-de-Marne

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

During the enquiry conducted in that region at the beginning of 1990 I compiled a substantial press file, obtained two written depositions from direct observers, and met actors in the case: local journalists, inhabitants of the region who had participated in the unsuccessful search parties or organised them, and a lieutenant of the *louveterie.* This is a body of unpaid hunters nominated by the Dept. of the Environment with the mission to organise the fight against beasts and other dangerous animals. They must maintain a dog pack; the *louveterie* is very attached to its ancient past, the organization having been established by Charlemagne in 813 A.D. I also met gendarmes of Grignan and the organiser from ASPAS—the same association of nature-lovers that had filed suit in the Fontan Wolf's case. The headquarters of ASPAS are situated in Drôme, and the association had protested against the search parties and watches organised by the hunters' federation, asserting that the mystery puma had been clandestinely poisoned by the hunters. On the occasion of this case, local solidarities were expressed; they were set in motion by the search parties and reinforced by a reaction to the somewhat mocking tone of the national media that presented the case around Christmas. However, apart from impressive spoor and five sighting depositions authenticated by the gendarmes, the animal spotted in Réauville did not cause much damage (one ewe only) and was most discreet.

ANALYSIS OF REACTIONS TOWARDS THE ANOMALY

This analysis has been constructed from my case studies and from the published studies of other cases.

The repertory

An analysis of human reactions towards an anomaly—anomaly largely built up by the observers themselves—shows a whole repertory of hypotheses concerning the mysterious animal.

What is the primary, remote origin of this intruder: domestic (stray dog or feral cat), wild and native (wolf or lynx), or wild and exotic (panther or puma)?

What is its secondary, proximate origin: wild or close to man?

Is its behaviour gentle or aggressive, does it seek or flee human presence?

What is its autonomy: is it a pet whose presence is the consequence of brief escapes hardly noticed by its negligent master, but which is lodged and fed regularly, which accounts for its elusiveness; or is it deliberately released and sent out temporarily by an evil master as an instrument of bad neighbourliness; or is it a permanently strayed and totally autonomous animal?

Manipulations and strategies

This repertory feeds conversational exchanges and articles in newspapers and magazines; it is manipulated by the social groups directly affected by the cases, and the disputes that oppose these groups—especially as to the place that should be allocated to wildlife—are reflected in the interpretations they give to the strange apparition. Several sub-groups can be distinguished:

(a) Bodies of social control: police and gendarmes, administrations, local representatives, whose role is to control the public and to maintain law and order.

(b) Experts: from the local amateur to the professional like the veterinary and to the scientist or the envoy of the authorities (like Véronique Herrenschmidt mandated by

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

ONC), their logic is different from that of the bodies of social control, even if they act as their auxiliaries. Official experts reach predictable conclusions: the mystery animal is domestic (stray dog or feral cat), or if it is a wild species, it is a pet or an ex-captive.

(c) Sheep farmers and cultivators: victims of damage that sometimes puts in danger of bankruptcy these professionals whose economic survival is difficult on today's competitive scene. Sheep farmers centre their argument on the damage caused by uncontrolled animals, whether wild and protected or domestic and impossible to identify. Sheep farmers are the only subgroup to pay serious attention to the damage caused by stray dogs. The partial data I consulted (drawn from research conducted in the Rhône-Alpes region by the National Sheep Association) shows that the sheep farmers consider they are insufficiently protected, the law considering first the dog-owners' rights. They do not get the measures they call for: to be able to destroy dogs straying near their flocks, to obtain that local mayors enforce the rules against stray dogs, and compulsory insurance for all dog owners.

(d) Hunters: participating in the search parties in rural areas, they stress the usefulness of their role, insisting upon their proficiency and technical skills, and associating themselves with the social control bodies and the experts.

(e) Nature protectors: they intervene to attack hunters (whom they pronounce both incompetent and ferocious) and to defend the wild animals, thus preferring interpretations stressing human responsibilities: neglectfulness or malevolence of the owners. Some of them take pretext of these cases to remind the public that they still dream of reintroducing in the French countryside predators whose disappearance has diminished our cultural heritage.

Object construction in local communities

The interpretation of an extraordinary event is a process of collective object construction which is built up by integrating traditional traits. In communities which are still rural, the exceptional event reactivates a whole set of stereotyped tales of encounters with exceptional, abnormal animals. These tales situated in present times feed upon a past which still seems close. Thus during my fieldwork in the Drôme, 40-year-old men started by telling me they knew the man who knew the man who'd seen the wolf during very cold winters in the forties, then went on to explain they know personally the man who'd seen three or four years ago a panther or a lynx stalking his chicken. Themselves, not long ago, had personally spotted the lynx at the edge of the ditch, under a cart or in the barn.

The controversies which have surrounded and still do surround the reintroduction of lynxes are well known to our interviewees. They have conferred a new legitimacy, an apparent rationality on these gratifying anecdotes. One can tell them without sounding credulous or ridiculous, and in Drôme the locals seize upon the facts of lynxes discovered on the occasion of the sudden appearance of an exceptional beast. Everyone in 1990 expressed doubts about the exceptional animal—was it real or just an illusion?—but belief in ubiquitous lynxes. Including the authorities, everyone told me 'We've got them, we got lots of them here'. However, it is still in small groups and in an atmosphere of trust that these stereotyped anecdotes are told. They are meant to be relished and shared rather than to be believed. These are tales that entail from the listener this 'willing suspension of disbelief'[17] characteristic of legends both traditional and contemporary.

Spoor and hair are moulded, measured and analyzed; phone calls are made to zoo directors. However, this apparent scientism masks traditional elements that are numerous

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

in these cases. Thus the variability of the sightings (that could lead one to imagine a whole array of wild beasts) is already present in the letter of the Lozère Préfet to the Ministry of the Interior on the 17th of October 1809:

> There is no agreement as to this animal's species (...). Some say it is a big wolf, others that it is like a bear. A peasant who saw the second child's abduction by this beast stated to the *lieutenant de louveterie* that it was the size of a donkey and had brown fur. Finally the mayor of Saint André Capcèze told me that according to the information he gathered the animal has the approximate size of a big wolf, a spiky blackish mane along its back, a long bushy tail and an extemely long muzzle.[18]

The same variability can be noticed in the case of the Valais Monster in Switzerland in 1946, where statements of witnesses would lead one to think that there was a lynx, five panthers and a puma.[19] Also the behaviour attributed to the animal is stereotyped and contradictory; too bold and unafraid of men, but also elusive, wild-looking and aggressive. Yesterday explained as a sign of a devilish origin or of a werewolf-type metamorphosis, this trait is now rationalised and given as proof of domestic origin or of continued control by an evil human master.[20]

At the level of the local communities which the unusual event fuses into a commenting public, processes of construction of reality are set up, processes from which arise evaluations, judgments about the reality (or unreality) of the facts. During the discussion there will be comparisons, sometimes unification within a single class of events first considered as distinct. Discussions are not limited to the problem of reality (or unreality) of the facts, but also evaluate the credit to be given to the witnesses; the group operates its own critical sociology.

Just like when a major crisis (earthquake, flood, war or other disaster) destroys usual social landmarks, the group's intellectual resources focus upon the noted anomalies, hypotheses are constructed, interpretations offered and discussed in conversational exchanges.[21] The unusual event binds the group: something is now happening that goes beyond the trite and the ordinary, here is a story, a tale to tell that surpasses the ordinary tale for which one has to negotiate the audience's attention, a tale that allows one to illustrate a problem or realize a dream through the narration of an exemplary story that makes a point.[22] The group comments upon, discusses the exceptional sights that one or several of its members have seen. The experiences told, often backed up by other similar experiences, are discussed, evaluated. Proofs are constructed and an object takes shape, or is rejected if the arguments that back it up are judged too weak.

Offering no conclusive evidence, the official sceptical reports that close these cases do not carry conviction for the group. Moreover, being sent only to the social control bodies and hunters' federations, these reports are hardly publicised. A climate of uncertainty lingers, that makes possible and even probable for some that a new episode will spring up, while others will be more sceptical in the future. Between believers and sceptics the facts (sightings, spoor or damage) become the object of this debate that constitutes, according to Dégh and Vázsonyi, the very essence of legend construction.[23]

Object construction in the media

The treatment of these micro-events in the media is of capital importance. It is through their appearance in the press that they become known beyond a restricted public. The analysis of this treatment—often considered as uninteresting distortions and

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

misrepresentations—seems useful. For the Var cases, Pierre Lagrange indicates the major role of the local correspondent who created a case by drawing together disparate observations.

In France the media system does not devote much attention to the cases of appearances of beasts and mystery cats. My country differs on this point from Great Britain in which two major cases in 1963 and 1982 and a more open media system have created a model, established a type of tale of the appearance of an Alien Big Cat.[24] This French indifference is based upon the irony of the journalist towards local people whom he will readily declare backward and stupid. Thus a typical mocking leader called 'The Puma', evoking other quests for mystery animals in nearby Ardèche, was published with the first articles about the Réauville Beast's appearance:

> This lion or tiger hunt reminds me of another hunt, a puma hunt, led some twelve years ago around Bourg. (...) I had brought along, with my notebook, the 'wild animals' colour page of a dictionary. A witness explained to me, hopping from one animal to the next, 'It had the head of this, the body of that, and the tail of that'. However, we never saw much, and later were told that the puma was only a cat.[25]

This lack of interest can also be explained through the poor development of the regional dailies' newspaper libraries that do not cover the local pages in which these news items are generally published. Unfiled and unknown, the stories cannot accumulate and feed from each other. Thus for the newspaper library of the *Dauphiné Libéré* situated at the headquarters near Grenoble, the Réauville Beast does not exist in December 1989 [personal communication], even though a year before more than 10 articles had covered this subject in the local pages *Ardèche et Drôme* of this daily, articles that made several frontpage headlines of the newspaper's Montélimar edition. In April 1988, six months before the appearance of a puma in Réauville, local neighbouring editions of the *Dauphiné Libéré* had mentioned the appearance of a panther on the border of Vaucluse and Drôme at 60 kms from Réauville as the crow flies. I think the local journalists from Montélimar had not heard about this incident, and that I made it known to them at the beginning of 1990. I found the same lack of interest for a case that was a nationwide topic, the case of the Fontan Wolf. The newspaper library of *Nice Matin* which I visited is far from having indexed all the articles this newspaper has published on this case. It is through a systematic reading of the issues of that period that I have built up a fuller press file, enriched with columns whose analysis is richest for the sociologist—such as editorials commenting upon readers' letters—but judged uninteresting by the media themselves.

These news items that are not worth an indexed file belong to an inferior class of information. A proof of this is that when manipulative news items are published (generally by lovers of wildlife who use kite-flying methods to further their aims), administrations seem to judge it useless to deny them. Thus an article published in December 1983 in *Nice Matin* erroneously announcing the forthcoming release of a couple of lynxes in the Mercantour National Park near Fontan was not born spontaneously, but was certainly a kite flown by reintroduction activists. This article was discussed at a session of the Environment Department's National Council for Nature Protection, but I could find no trace of the administrative denial announced. Similarly, there was no reply to posters announcing erroneously that reintroductions of lynxes in Isère had been decided upon (when the administration was only evaluating the possible impact of reintroductions, and had not decided between Isère and Vosges, the latter being finally chosen).[26]

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

The climate of uncertainty and doubt thus created largely explains the success of viper-release stories. Furthermore, media personalities from the world of militant wildlife protectors grab each occasion to state their dream of reintroducing the wolf in open areas, which creates many confusions.[27] Many people in the *Massif Central* believe that wolves have been officially reintroduced in Margeride, the region of the famous Gévaudan Beast in the 18th century; this is better known in Cantal than the forgotten Cézallier Beast that roamed the département in 1946-1951.[28] Local projects exist, pushed by the tourist office, but strongly rejected by the farmers' organizations; they do not seem, however, to carry the necessary approval of the Environment Department.

Although minor, the subject of the appearance of an unusual animal exists. Considered by local correspondents (with a twinkle of irony) as 'good subjects' that can attract the attention of the national media, these appearances lead to the unknown, the mysterious, the irruption of the wild; they mobilize the latest cultural repertory surrounding felines.

The real object: irruption of the wild

Although injuries to livestock caused by stray dogs are numerous, they do not rouse public emotion, and their appearance in official experts' reports closes the information, or rather transfers it to a technical level which affects only a limited public: agricultural technicians, sheep farmers, veterinaries and insurers. For the media the series is then closed: all that remains is the banal, the commonplace. It is the same when a mysterious murder that made headlines is revealed to have been perpetrated by someone close to the victim for a trite motive: the information quickly leaves the TV screens or the newspaper headlines.

As early as the 1977 appearance of the Vosges Beast the main features of the media approach are fixed. The case arouses interests because it permits fantastic associaions that create good, exciting copy:

> One feels a bit as if one were facing a story of another era, as if the disturbing presence of this beast awoke ancestral terrors and forgotten reflexes (...) the Vosges Beast, even if it is less murderous than that of Gévaudan, has reawakened the ancestral fear of the wolf. An undefined horror hovers over the villages at nightfall.[29]

These fantastic associations sometimes slipped into distortion, when the journalists did not confine themselves to mentioning the historical affair of the monstrous beast of Gévaudan, but went on to describe the present inhabitants of the area as superstitious dim-wits oppressed by age-old terrors, thus causing hostile reactions at the local level, amongst the people and in the press.[30]

Ten years later the mystery animal glimpsed in April 1988 on the borders of the Drôme and Vaucluse also inspired playful paragraphs alluding to the panic of the inhabitants—thus implicitly presented as fossils themselves, as much as the Beast of the olden days:

> At nightfall, everyone locks himself up in homes with closed shutters, the door safely bolted. In one bedroom out of two, the light is left on all night to discourage the black yellow-eyed beast, with its sharp fangs and its spiky claws, from roaming, as in a nightmare, around the bed.[31]

The accidental irruptions of the wild in our life are noteworthy, not only in cases of mystery animals but also when the case concludes with the capture or death of an animal, as we have seen with the Fontan Wolf. A wider conceptual class appears here: that of a commentary upon whatever violates the borderline between the wild and the

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

domestic, between nature and culture. In the old days such themes were quoted in the broadsheets that popularized Curious and Interesting Events: today they are systematically reported by the press in accounts of the escape of unusual pet animals: lions, snakes, apes or other beasts.[32] This is, I think, the reason for the emphasis (today rationalised) upon the over-bold behaviour of the mysterious wild animal. One finds in the folk traits traditionally attributed to snakes (and hotly denied by contemporary herpetologists) this same accusation of violating borderlines. Snakes are presented as extremely bold, fond of milk, entering human bodies.[33] It seems that these traits have a mainly symbolic value; what is important is that they suggest a close familiarity, an extraordinary contiguity between ourselves and some specimens of the species we reject.

Not abstract wild animals but felines and wolves

These cases mobilize the latent cultural repertory concerning felines and wolves; this is what explains their impact and resonance.

The struggle of peasants, shepherds and hunters against wolves has left an important and long-lasting impression in French popular culture. It is a long story that I cannot tell within the scope of this paper; I shall simply refer the reader to the fascinating books of Bernard and Ragache on the history of wolves.[34] The notorious Gévaudan Beast of the 18th century[35] is not forgotten today. It is the second and final example given (after the Beast of the Apocalypse) for the 'Religious' and 'mythological' senses of the word 'Bête' in the *Trésor de la Langue Française.* It is always alluded to when an unusual animal appears, and in Pierre Lagrange's fieldwork it was the only historical reference known and spontaneously mentioned by everyone. This wolf that decimated flocks and killed people is evocative of a past forever gone, and its absence is felt as a cultural gap. This justifies the indignation of readers writing to *Nice Matin* on the occasion of the death of the Fontan Wolf, together with the regrets of journalists and of local historians digging up recent stories about the wolves' final disappearance.

Yet, in parallel to these positive reactions integrating the wolf in our cultural heritage, there remain negative reactions, often very emotional, based upon exaggerated memories of its murderous past. This latent cultural repertory is manifest in the rich metaphoric senses, often pejorative, applying to humans the words designating these animals. (See 'Bête', 'Bestial', 'Fauve', 'Loup' in the *Trésor de la Langue française* which aims to describe the French language from 1789 till 1960).

Big Cats hold a very special niche within our implicit systems of classification and representation of animals, our symbolic bestiary. They stand for greed, ferociousness, violence, but also seduction and beauty. Mainly they symbolize might and power, and are associated with rulers and kings. The ancient presence of Big Cats in seignorial and royal menageries since the early Middle Ages, and their prominence in heraldry, attest to the richness of these associations. There is an ancient tradition which claims, in cases of exceptional wolves or lynxes, the presence of exotic felines, alien to the country and brought into it by evil nobles and their allies or servants. Studying in parallel ancient and modern cases, Michel Meurger has shown how this legendary tradition (now modernized, since the rich and the ecologist have replaced the evil noble and his aides or the outlaw of the olden days) 'penetrates and influences reality'.[36]

Several aspects of the imagery associated with beasts and felines, a cultural repertory whose study is generally approached through erudition, go far beyond my aim. I simply intend to draw attention to as much of this latent repertory as surfaces in the media and the public on the occasion of the appearance of an unusual animal.

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD

Unexplained appearances of mystery animals are reported all over the world today. Beliefs in the existence of fabulous and supernatural animals are ubiquitous and timeless. In the continents discovered by Europe indigenous beliefs and tales have strongly influenced the perceptions of the conquerors confronted by a new natural environment. In parallel with the growing importance of the scientific approach, these traditional mythical tales have been endowed with a sometimes highly artificial precision and have given birth to contemporary legends solidly entrenched in their territories. The belief self-perpetuates today through multiple observations enhanced by the media and encouraged (largely with the aim of gain for touristic promotion) by the local population, often genuinely convinced of the reality of this profitable phenomenon.

For lake monsters, the best-known example is that of Loch Ness, but one can also quote its Canadian parallels. For Canada the process has been recently studied by Michel Meurger who has conducted fieldwork to study contemporary beliefs, but also presents the historical roots (European and Amerindian) of these traditions.[37] In the same areas of belief, one can quote the hairy humanoids met all over the planet and sometimes universally famous: Yeti, Abominable Snowman or Bigfoot.[38] Closer to our subject are the appearances of phantom felines that flourish in Great Britain since the sixties[39] but also exist in the whole world.[40]

Four currents can be distinguished in the study of mysterious animal appearances.

A first approach, strongly represented in Great Britain, follows the line of the eccentric American author Charles Fort. This formidable compiler of anomalies was active in the twenties and thirties. Mainly American and English, the movement of the Forteans has developed along his lines and chases anomalies with eclectism and talent. Published in Great Britain, the *Fortean Times* bulletin has an international readership and records all sorts of contemporary weirdnesses and anomalies, from crying statues and UFOs, to apparitions of Blessed Virgin Mary, phantom planes or submarines, mysterious crop circles (the latest), etc. *Fortean Times* and other analogous publications like *Folklore Frontiers* are small irregular self-supporting publications, known by a small core of faithful and curious supporters, who do an extraordinary job of reading and clipping the international press and give publicity to phenomena that in France—where the small core is very small and less active—are smothered by our media's inertia.

A second approach interprets anomaly as a description of unknown but natural phenomena, and tries to extract from fabulous tales and antiquated beliefs the scientific observations that are there (hidden like precious metal within ore) and to arrive thus, applying rigorous and factual methods, to the identification of animal species still unknown to science. Participants in this approach have called it cryptozoology, presenting it as a branch of zoology consecrated to the discovery of animals still hidden, unknown. Books have been successful in the fifties, an international society has been created in the eighties, a yearly journal and a newsletter popularize the movement's activities (amongst which was a conference co-organized with the Folklore Society in July 1990 in Guildford). This movement seems to deserve the appellation of parascience, like parapsychology: the same corpus is endlessly reviewed; many scientists participate, but for those who have an official status of university professor or researcher, the participation is a private hobby.

Closer to the Forteans, one finds a third approach that draws on occultism and supernatural explanations: teleportations (from the past or from a contemporary but remote universe or part of our planet), materialisations of aggressive thoughts, temporary

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

incarnation of malevolent forces haunting cursed places. Such are the main explanations offered by the representatives of these tendencies, who publish frequently.[41] It was an important component of Charles Fort's approach, but he mixed it with a solid proportion of humour and irreverence towards official truths.

There is also the fourth approach that can be called folkloristic, and studies legends as symbolic collective productions. This approach analyzes the social conditions that surround the emergence of tales of mystery animals but also tries to seize their own narrative dynamism. The folkloristic and the Fortean approaches share the same object of study but their aims differ. The folklorist studies contemporary legends that present themselves as true, but does not believe them, while the Forteans talk to us about the truth of unbelievable stories.

Forteans, cryptozoologists, occultists, folklorists discuss and dispute, not only of course about mystery animals and phantom felines but also about a whole array of anomalies, of phenomena whose existence is not accepted by an official science that considers them as fabrications, superstitions, naive expression of a yearning for wonders, etc. The main effect of this situation is to create an area of controversy in which anomalies seem to feed on the very discussions they create, discussions that perpetuate the phenomena. Another effect is to foster meticulous research by passionate amateurs that gives an insight into the collective build-up and self-persuasion mechanism in action, and allows an interpretation of the deep meaning of these phenomena that goes further than press articles written in a hurry to amuse readers.

INTERPRETATION

In conclusion to this study, what impression is made by the appearances of beasts and mystery cats studied? They seem a tenuous series that arouses a growing interest probably influenced by the worldwide trends in the study of anomalies rapidly sketched above. This series is based on minor events—the last major case dating from 1977 with the Vosges Beast. In spite of the French media's inertia, one can state that these minor events arouse genuine collective emotions. Appearances of beasts and mystery cats are therefore a perceived 'fact' as much if not more than material facts.

However, I shall not adopt the easy reductionism that seems sometimes to characterize the attitudes of official authorities on this subject. Even if sightings, spoor, anomalous injuries to sheep have not been concluded by a flawless explanation, by an irreproachable proof, it is hardly legitimate to deny the existence of these anomalies or to attribute them with certainty to a big domestic stray animal, without explaining its arrival or its disappearance, moreover. Witnesses offer statements and come forward without being directly concerned in their vital interests; something has happened, and to deny it is to violate reality. There are many feral, 'marooned' animals in depopulated rural France;[42] however, manipulative behaviour of ferocious trained animals cannot be dismissed offhand, especially when these sightings are accompanied by serious damage. Hypotheses of clandestine releases by nature lovers cannot be dismissed either: clandestine wolf-releases are routinely asserted amongst friends of nature:

> In Europe, many wolves have already been discreetly released (...) in February 1978 I heard the wolf in Lubéron (Vaucluse) (...) I've waited until this book to mention it.[43]

or in an approving press:

> Since man's impact on his environment has become so grave some rebels, aiming to mend the pieces of a dying world, do not desitate to release discreetly, here and there, in Europe, captive wolves in secret sites. With the hope to restore *Canis lupus* in the place that was his.[44]

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Of course such deviant behaviours (especially the manipulation of ferocious trained animals) are very difficult to assess. The very fact that they are so frequently mentioned as explanations for anomalies forbids us, however, to ignore them. As Dégh and Vázsonyi said when talking about serial murderers:

> We have to accept that fact can become narrative and narrative can become fact (...) The narrative, as the last phase which precedes and helps the fact to existence, could be regarded and named 'proto-fact'.[45]

However, the events remain of reduced importance, generally engimatic and unexplained.

The explanation most often given for these events by the offical enquiries they occasion—that is the explanation through the uncontrolled presence of domestic animals, of stray dogs—is for public opinion an explanation that closes the series, after which there are no news, no articles, except in the specialised circles directly concerned. It thus appears that the perceived 'fact' which causes collective emotion is the intrusion of the wild, of the animal displaced within human society—even if it is an escaped animal, for then its place amongst us should only be that of a captive, linked to a master or to an enclosed terrtory. Furthermore, the recollections left in French collective memory by the fight against wolves, as well as the symbolic and emblematic value given to exotic felines, give a very special importance to intrusions by these species. Most of the cases are not concluded, they remain open. They entail widespread accusations of releases, but people talk of accidental releases or of deliberate releases caused by militants, hardly of deliberate releases caused by the authorities as in the case of viper-release stories.[46]

NEW CONCEPTIONS OF WILDLIFE

Traditional traits link these cases to the past; however, they have been reinforced by the policy of protection, rehabilitation and reintroduction of species formerly considered as vermin or pests: birds of prey, snakes, lynxes. This policy is based on new conceptions of the universe, no longer centred upon the human species but defined as an ecosystem that must maintain the totality of interrelations between the global range of life forms.

The ancient dichotomy that distinguished in nature cultivated and humanised areas producing resources from wild areas whose ever-menacing expansion had to be contained by endless labour, has been succeeded by an opposition between industry (to which a rationalised and highly productive agriculture claims to belong) and nature, which mixes rural areas left on the margins of these highly productive zones and wild nature in natural parks, the whole belonging to 'third-type zoos, unfenced animal parks whose limit is the whole rural space'.[47] Nature becomes a resource to be defended against the encroachments of men, and the obnoxious or evil wild animal of yesterday, rehabilitated and reintroduced, is transformed into the emblem of these spaces recaptured from polluting mankind, of this protected nature.[48] In such a conception the notion of pests, animals considered as harmful because they damage the productions of humans, even humans themselves, is no longer legitimate. It is as an example of human folly that one recalls that the destruction of vipers, 'small carnivorous mammals' (ferrets, weasels, skunks and vixens) and wolves was fostered and encouraged by official authorities. The only pests recognised as such are proliferating animal populations, especially in urban areas: pigeons, insects or rats. Words become taboo as the concept is rejected: the terms 'pests' or 'vermin' are no longer acceptable. From scientists to militants, a whole sector of public opinion actively denounces the truths of yesterday as absurd legends. It is

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

with gusto that these ancient ideas are demolished in the name of biological knowledge, but with a really human passion. If an animal is dangerous, it can only be after it has had contact, probably polluting, with humans. When in beast cases many sheep are killled, this behaviour is systematically called aberrant if the guilty party turns out to be a wild animal, and it is automatically asserted that it must have had contact with humans.

There is a positive promotion of the former pests through identification with these tabooed species. This proximity is shown by their importance in mass culture (movies) and by the systematic use of a humanizing vocabulary: 'babies' has replaced 'cubs' for seals as well as for lynxes. Big cats, wolves, bears, birds of prey, snakes and batrachians are very different animals that share at various levels the characteristic of being rejected and tabooed, but also of attracting groups of enthusiasts who range from simple picture collectors to trainers, collectors, breeders. These enthusiasts maintain close but ambiguous contact with nature-protection militants. If the aims of these two groups can occasionally coincide (for example, when such species are reintroduced or reinforced in an area), they cannot be considered as identical. To love rejected animals is to show and nurture a personal trait that demonstrates that you belong to the elite and are capable of rejecting the common man's silly options; these closed passionate fraternities are quite arrogant. Their passion expresses also a more or less open rejection of humans to whom they oppose their animal, its true innocence and its real beauty.

Passionate wolf-lovers have launched a major campaign of rehabilitation, asserting that wolves have never killed anyone—except wolves suffering from rabies, and maybe not even then! Though the *Trésor de la Langue française* still defines the Gévaudan Beast as 'an animal that sowed terror in a great area of France from 1765 til 1787 and was revealed as a loup-cervier' and though historians still talk of several wolves in succession in the same region,[49] in most present-day articles and books, the story of the Gévaudan Beast is rewritten as fantasy so as to exonerate wolves. The Beast is alleged to have been a sadistic killer, a Protestant settling his scores with the Catholic inhabitants of Gévaudan, a tame hyena, a bear. One is faced with a systematically constructed interpretation as complicated as the set of explanations and hypotheses concerning Jack the Ripper's identity or the real perpetrators in John Fitzgerald Kennedy's murder—but which, admittedly, interests a much more restricted public.[50] These campaigns have been very successful, and a cryptozoologist participating in the spring of 1990 in a TV discussion programme about wolves told me the historian of the group was the only one who still believed wolves had killed people in the old days.[51] It may seem that I attach too much importance to declarations spurred by generous motives of exoneration. But this radical change of perspective is not minor, it upsets the whole of our symbolic bestiary.

Some of these wolf-lovers run shows: in truly modern spirit they show a man turned wild, who is identifying with the pack, rather than tame, humanised animals; however, just as in the rejected shows of yesterday's circus, it is not so much the animal as the interplay of exchanges between the animal and the human showman that the public comes to watch in the Lozère's Park of Gévaudan or in the Saar's Kammerfort forest.[52] As to exotic felines, no such shows are entailed by their captivity in zoos and animal parks or with private collectors, which is fashionable but brings zootechnical and mainly social problems to the owners whose neighbours generally actively oppose these exceptional tastes.

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

As if hoping to be forgiven for an exploitation that degrades the animal to a touristic attraction, or simply for the captivity in which they keep it, showmen and collectors stress their projects of reintroduction in open spaces, of enrichment of real wild and natural life. Owners of exotic felines dream of compensating for the decline of these animals in their original homelands and of reintroducing panthers and jaguars in Africa and America; Gérard Ménatory, the friend of wolves, explains in magazines that his project of releasing wolves in a forest of 484 acres situated in Margeride is well advanced.[53] This project is probably very popular at the local level with the Tourist Office of Lozère, but very unpopular with farmers' organisations. It is hardly likely that it will receive the Environment Department's approval, necessary in a centralized country like France, and Gérard Ménatory does not mention this project in his book.[54] A real ambiguity does exist about the reintroduction of wolves. The repeated April Fool hoaxes announcing their escape or their official reintroduction typify these ambiguities (an escape from Gévaudan Wolf Park announced by *Midi Libre* on the 1st of April 1987; official reintroduction announced by *Plaisir de la Chasse* on five pages in April 1986). A proposal to reintroduce a wolf pack in the national landmark park of Chambord has been presented to the official conference of Saint Jean du Gard about the reintroductions of animal species organised by the Environment Department in December 1988.[55]

In the model embracing the whole range of animal categories that he proposes as a conclusion to his reflexion upon 'the social production of norms governing our relationship to the wild animal', Micoud stresses the kinship between pets that are the object of emotional links and wild animals, cleansed of all dangerous aspects and referred to as 'living in a state of natural freedom', which have become the emblem of a well balanced protected nature.[56] On the axis of the more or less individualized relation to the living (that for Micoud structures the model as much as the ancient axis domestic/wild), pets and wild animals are close to individuation, while yesterday's farm animals move away and become 'biological matter', are 'undifferentiated, made invisible as living individualities'.[57]

The fascinating evolution of the pets category seems marked by a closer and closer identification with masters for whom they are emblem, child substitute, friend, remedy to loneliness. Pets are entitled to psychiatric care, to astrological advice, to pet-sitters, and are sometimes offered diamond necklaces and lead the life of art possessions. An ancient phenomenon, but in marked progression in contemporary society. Pets only reach this over-privileged status after they have become devoid of usefulness.[58]

Quite opposite is the destiny of what we used to call farm animals, of the livestock produced for our consumption that should rather be called today industrialised animals or revenue animals. They are only raw material for the food industry:

> Between breeders and their livestock, the gap becomes steadily wider. To the hyper-domestication, over production, overvaluation of pets are radically opposed the underdomestication, ill-treatment, marginalization of revenue animals.[59]

Animal-lovers who often attack traditional rural populations do not seem moved by this marginalization and exclusion of revenue animals. Militancy on behalf of this category is still weak in France, and indignation remains concentrated on the treatment of animals that are hunted:

> Animal defenders—city dwellers or new villagers—seem as indifferent to the marginalization of farm animals as to the end of peasants.[60]

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

In contrast with these two categories, the wild animal is the real 'other' in which our over-abundant species finds dream and solace, living memory of a real diversity of species in the universe. Witness to the order of ecological balance that we hope to restore after we have tamed the anarchy of industry, emblem of protected nature, its presence reassures and enriches us.

Symbolic discourse and usefulness of negative animals

Animals are the pretext for a metaphoric and analogous discourse upon human society. The refusal of this mode of thought by scientists and ecologists creates an uneasiness in the general public which is always attached to the 'savage mind', creator of metaphors, associations, cultural symbols and emblems.[61] In this perspective the existence of negatively perceived animal species is a logical necessity. If to talk about animals is also to talk about men, one must be able to express evil as well as good. To remark that negative animals are 'good to think' is not to defend cruel practices towards some animal categories.

Leach has offered the model of a symbolic organisation of animal species as metaphor of the relationships amongst humans, animals ordering themselves from pets to livestock on to game and wild animals both close and faraway (the latter being frequently designated by long complicated names such as rhinoceros or hippopotami), in a series echoing that of humans who range from the identical to the radically different, passing through kinship, alliance, trade exchanges and war. Linked to the rules that concern their killing and their alimentary value (or its rejection, as for pets or for the whole class of dogs), the ritual values of animal categories of our symbolic bestiary are extremely diverse, and this very diversity allows the discussion of the whole range of our society.[62]

Through the genres of conversation and of oral narrative, but also through the productions of popular culture and of children's literature, by the means of performance and of the elaborations of dominant culture (major literature and scientific knowledge) we build around wild animals models that are 'good to think', privileged support of symbols that allow us to comment upon our social relationships through the indirect means of implicit analogies. It is indeed through parables, analogies and discourses that symbols are expressed.[63] Collective symbolic creations built around wild animals (especially around negative animals) and staging their irruption have metaphoric and analogic functions: they show the limits of human society. Although the dominant mode of thought rejects them, one can note the persistence of the use of negative animals in propaganda and publicity which are great creators and consumers of animal metaphors. This persistence is ritually denounced as 'medieval superstitions' by militants, who rarely seem to reflect on the psychological roots of these phobias or of 'The fear of nature'.[64] 'Wild' in the sense of 'outlawed' may have disappeared from the socially tolerated discourse upon animals, but in the jungle of modern cities these metaphors are always used to brand rebellious or delinquent youths. Movie bikers of *The Wild One*—directed in 1953 by Laslo Benedek and starring Marlon Brando and Lee Marvin—have inspired a whole generation. A gang squatting in caves in Council Estates and perpetrating collective rapes can be called 'Les Rats de Trappes',[65] and the terms of 'wolf packs' going 'wilding' in 'a sort of group joyrun' are used by the spokesman of the Manhattan district attorney to denounce the raids of the New York gangs—including the very young attackers of the Central Park Jogger in April 1989.[66] Does one recall that in 19th century Paris the social panic towards the 'dangerous classes' was expressed

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

by the terms Savages, Mohicans, Apaches, comparing the rejected to savages, human beings then judged by public opinion as close to the lawless animal? And that these derogatory terms were picked up and appropriated by the suburban gangs even then?

We can see that the evolution of conceptions about animals is only half accepted by the general public which remains attached to an implicit metaphoric and analogous discourse for which the notion of the negative animal retains legitimacy.

The logical conflict

Contradictory feelings coexist in the general public about the reintroduction of animals, especially when they concern species judged dangerous and tabooed. On the one hand reintroductions are approved, as they restitute and reinstate the richness and diversity of a dilapidated heritage, as they enrich a natural patrimony and restore what had been lost. This is how scientists present them.[67] On the other hand they are rejected because these reintroductions risk causing an upsurge of a wildness which only the peasant's incessant labour controlled and reduced. A logical conflict grows from these contradictory feelings that coexist in most of us: it resolves itself by the creation of exemplary stories that talk about the weird intrusion of predators, of alien big cats, of vipers parachuted from the East, of the wild amongst us.

At this stage we can turn again to the viper-release stories rapidly sketched in the introduction to this paper. Both sets of narratives talk about releases of dangerous wild animals, to account for their proliferation. These are chiefly accidental for beasts and big cats, for which any voluntary releases are considered as caused by militants; chiefly deliberate for vipers, for which the voluntary releases are attributed to the official authorities. The appearances of beasts and mystery cats are only protolegends (with some local encroachments, as in mountainous Esterel), while viper-release stories have evolved into a full-fledged typified and fixed legend. The main reason for this difference is, I think, that vipers are still strongly tabooed and negatively perceived, while the images of wolves and exotic felines are more blurred and contradictory. These release tales are indeed legends of protest that apply better in the case of the most tabooed animal species which constitute for everyone an ultimate horror, a maximum of those negative characteristics necessary to structure an exemplary story.

Through the creation of fantasies, through the production of exemplary stories, these two series of narratives express the malaise caused by the official acceptance of the new ideas, contradicted by the persistent attachment to the ancient concepts. However, these two series are different in tone. Viper-release stories carry an accusing and negative message that expresses the anguish of a threatened social group which is experiencing a loss of material well-being as well as of influence and power. The appearances of big cats and beasts have a strong playful and poetic connotation that coexists with the negative and accusing message. They reactivate ancient themes and seem also to be the occasion of a collective creation of a beyond that attracts through its very mystery.

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique,
54 Boulevard Raspail,
75270 Paris Cedex 06, France

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper was presented at the conference *Imaginaire des Fauves et Félins* held in Paris on 16 November 1990 with the sponsorship of SRETIE, the Service of Research Study and Information on the Environment, an agency of the French Environment Department.

I am grateful to Anne Vitu, of the Laboratoire de Démographie Historique, for preparing the map accompanying this paper, and to Jacqueline Simpson for helpful suggestions on points of translation from my original French text.

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

APPENDIX A
Cases of Beasts and Big Cats in France, 1945-1989 (1)

DATE	DEPARTEMENT (2)	Place	References (3)	Typology (4)
1945	Côte d'Or	Flavigny	(de Beaufort 87)	A.1
1947	Vienne (Haute)	Dournezac	(de Beaufort 87)	A.1
1951	Aisne	Vervins	(de Beaufort 87)	A.1 or A.2
	Lozère	Grandrieu	(idem) + press	A.1 or A.2 Cézallier Beast
	Meurthe-et-Moselle	Favières	(de Beaufort 87)	A.1 or A.2
1952	Savoie (Haute)	Rumilly	(de Beaufort 87)	A.1 or A.2
	Cantal	La Ribeyre	(de Beaufort 87)	A.1 or A.2
1954	Isère	Vignieu	(idem) + press	A.1 or A.2
	Loire-Atlantique	St. Jullien	(de Beaufort 87)	A.1 or A.2
	Cantal	Mauriac	(press)	B 'wolf'
	Loire (Haute)	St. Préjet	(press)	B 'wolf'
	Sèvres (Deux)	La Sauze	(press)	B 'wolf'
1956	Meurthe-et-Moselle		(press)	B 'wolf'
	Vienne (Haute)		(press)	B 'wolf'
	Vosges		(press)	B 'wolf'
	Ain	La Michaille	(press)	A.2
1958	Dordogne	St. Martin	(press)	B 'wolf'
1959	Loire	Vérannes	(press)	B 'animal'
1960	Corrèze	Ussel	(de Beaufort 87)	A.1 or A.2
1962	Gironde	St. Philippe	(de Beaufort 87)	A.1 or A.2
1963	Vosges	Rozières	(idem) + press	A.4
1968	Landes	Le Sen	(idem) + press	A.2 and/or A.3
	Landes	Luxey	(idem) + press	A.2 and/or A.3
1972	Seine-et-Marne	Gesvres	(de Beaufort 87)	A.3 Meaux Wolf
	Aisne	Cramaille	(de Beaufort 87)	A.3 Cramaille Beast
	Lozère	Aubrac	(Soulier 88)	A.3
1973	Seine	Parc Monceau Paris	(de Beaufort 87)	A.3 Ida
1974	Seine-et-Marne	Ferolles	(de Beaufort 87)	A.3
	Essonne	Ozoir	(press)	A.3
1975	Gers	Terraube	(press)	B 'animal'
	Val-de-Marne	Ambleville	(press)	A.3
1977	Vosges	Vosges	(de Beaufort 87) + press	B 'Vosges Beast'
	Lozère	Aubrac	(press)	A.3
1981	Pyrénées-Atlantiques	Larrau	(de Beaufort 87)	A.4
1982	Loire-Atlantique	Pornic	(Bro/Meurg 84)	B 'panther'
	Gers	Lagraulas	(Barloy 90)	B 'puma'
	Creuse	Noth	(Bro/Meurg 84)	B 'lioness'
1983	Var	Valescure	(press)	B 'puma'
1985	Gironde	Sadirac	(press)	B 'panther'
1986	Pas-de-Calais	Le Touquet	(Barloy 90) + press	B 'panther'
1987	Bouches-du-Rhône	Camargue	(press)	B 'lycaon'
	Var	St Maximin	(study)	B 'puma'
	Var	Tourtour	(study)	A.4
	Var	Agay	(study)	B 'puma'
	Alpes-Maritimes	Fontan	(study) + press	A.3

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

1988	Var	Cuers	(press)	B 'puma'
	Drôme/Vaucluse	Savouillans	(study)	B 'panther'
	Drôme	Suze la Rousse	(study)	B 'Félin'
	Drôme	Réauville	(study)	B 'Beast'
	Finistère	Landerneau	(Cornou 89)	A.3
	Puy-de-Dôme	Chappes	(press)	A.3
1989	Var	Estérel	(press)	A.4

(1) This table deliberately does not include the sightings and killings of lynxes in Ain, Isère, Jura, Vosges that were numerous in the eighties. A lynx was shot by hunters in 1974 in Ain, the incident being severely judged in the Press.
(2) See map of France to localise Départements.
(3) See notes 5, 10, 19, 50, and Cornou in *Dihun* 1989 (5).
(4) The typology includes: A closed cases that can correspond to: A.1 surviving wolves; A.2 wild wolves from neighbouring countries; A.3 domestic or captive wolves, abandoned, escaped or released; A.4 confusion with dogs; B open cases, where the name given to the mystery animal is given in quotation marks.

NOTES

1. Véronique Campion-Vincent, 'Viper-Release Stories: A Contemporary French Legend,' in Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith (eds.), *A Nest of Vipers: Perspectives on Contemporary Legends IV* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), pp. 11-40; 'Histoires de lâchers de vipères: une légende française contemporaine', *Ethnologie Française* 2 (1990), 143-55.
2. See articles cited in n.1, plus Véronique Campion-Vincent, 'Contemporary Legends about Animal Releases in Rural France', *Fabula* 31:3-4 (1990), 242-53; Valérie Périgne, *Les Vipères ont elles des ailes?* (Paris, Université René Descartes, 1989); Elizabeth Rémy, *La rumeur des lâchers de vipères* (Paris, research sponsored by SRETIE/MERE, 1989). See also Jean-Louis Brodu, 'Rumeur des champs', *OVNI-Présence* (April, 1990), 43-4.
3. Michael Goss, 'The Halifax Slasher and other "Urban Maniac" Tales' in Bennett and Smith, *op. cit.* in n.1, pp. 89-112; citation pp. 99-100.
4. *Ibid.*
5. François de Beaufort, *Le loup en France: éléments d'écologie historique* (Paris, Société française pour la protection des mammifères, 1987).
6. Personal communication, January 1988.
7. François Merlet and C. A. Fougeyrollas, 'Avons-nous encore des loups en France?', *Plaisirs de la chasse* 235 (1972), 32-9.
8. Gaston Picard, *La bête des Vosges: un mystérieux fait divers* (Strasbourg, La Nuée Bleue, 1989).
9. Jules Gritti, *Elle court, elle court, la rumeur* (Paris and Ottawa, Stanké, 1978); Henri-Pierre Jeudy, *La peur et les médias: essai sur la virulence* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1979).
10. Jean-Jacques Barloy, *Les survivants de l'ombre: Enquête sur les animaux mystérieux* (Paris, Arthaud, 1985); *idem*, 'Rumeurs sur les animaux mystérieux, inattendus ou insolites en France', *Communications* 52 (1990), 197-218; Christian Kempf, *Le retour des seigneurs de nos forêts d'Europe* (Paris, Sang de la Terre, 1987); ASPAS personal communication, 1990.
11. See Picard, n.8 above.
12. Jean-Louis Brodu and Michel Meurger, *Les félins-mystères: sur les traces d'un mythe moderne* (Paris, Pogonip, 1984).
13. Jean-Noël Kapferer, *Rumeurs, le plus vieux média du monde* (Paris, Seuil, 1987).
14. Brodu and Meurger, *op. cit.* in n.12.
15. Barloy, 'Rumeurs', n.10 above.
16. Véronique Campion-Vincent, *Fauves et félins-mystères: apparitions et imaginaire* (Paris, Research sponsored by SRETIE/MERE, 1990).
17. Gillian Bennett, 'Legend: Performance and Truth', in Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith, *Monsters with Iron Teeth: Perspectives on Contemporary Legend* III (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), citing Coleridge's well-known phrase.

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

18. Letter of 1809, quoted by Alain Molinier, *Les loups dans le quart Nord-Est de la France, fin XVIII°—début XIX° siècles* (Paris, Research sponsored by CNRS/ATP PIREN, 1988).
19. Michel Meurger, 'Les félins exotiques dans le légendaire français', *Communications* 92 (1990), 175-96, quoting Mariétan 1945-6.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (New York and Indianapolis, Bobbs Merrill Co. Inc., 1966).
22. Roger D. Abrahams, 'Our Native Notions of Story', *New York Folklore* II (1985), 37-48.
23. Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, 'Legend and Belief' in Dan Ben Amos (ed.), *Folklore Genres* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1976), pp. 92-123.
24. See Michael Goss, 'Alien Big Cat Sightings in Britain', *Folklore* 103 (1992), 184-202.
25. *Dauphiné Libéré,* 9 Dec. 1988.
26. Personal communication from Luc de Montal, March 1989.
27. Véronique Lesueur, 'Le maitre des loups', *L'Autre Journal* 5 (October 1990), 112-21.
28. Barloy, *Les Survivants* (as in n.10); Meurger, *op. cit.* in n.19.
29. *Journal du Dimanche,* 17 April 1977.
30. Picard, *op. cit.* in n.8.
31. *Parisien,* 27 April 1988.
32. Michael Goss, 'Escaped Boas and Other Urban Terrors', *Fate* 1 (1986, Aug.), 30-7; 2 (1986, Sept.), 78-88; Elliott Oring, 'Legend, Truth and News', *Southern Folklore* 47 (1990), 163-77.
33. Campion-Vincent, 'Viper-Release Stories', as in n.1.
34. Daniel Bernard, *L'homme et le loup* (Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1981); Claude-Catherine Ragache and Gilles Ragache, *Les loups en France: Légendes et réalité* (Paris, Aubier, 1981).
35. Robert Delort, 'La Guerre du loup', *L'Histoire* 63 (Feb. 1983), 6-14; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (dir.), *Histoire de la France rurale* (Paris, Seuil, 1975), vol. 2, ch. 3; Christophe Pincemaille, 'La Vérité sur la bête du Gévaudan, *L'Histoire* 101 (June 1987), 58-63.
36. Meurger, *op. cit.* in n.19.
37. Michel Meurger, *Lake Monster Traditions: A Cross-Cultural Analysis* (London, Fortean Tomes, 1988).
38. Janet Bord and Colin Bord, *Alien Animals: A Worldwide Investigation* (London, Panther Books Granada, 1980).
39. Michael Goss, 'Phantom Felines', *The Unknown* (1986) 1:5-10; 2:16-21; 3:70-75; 4:62-67; 5:11-17; see also his article in this issue of *Folklore* (as in n.24 above).
40. Karl P. N. Shuker, *Mystery Cats of the World: From Blue Tigers to Exmoor Beasts* (London, Robert Hale, 1989).
41. E.g. Bord and Bord, *op. cit.* in n.38.
42. Jean-Pierre Digard, *L'homme et les animaux domestiques: Anthropologie d'une passion* (Paris, Fayard, 1990).
43. Kempf, *op. cit.* in n.10, p. 91.
44. *Libération,* 14 March 1991.
45. Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, 'Does the Word "Dog" Bite? Ostensive Action as Means of Legend Telling', *Journal of Folklore Research* 20:1 (1983), 29.
46. Campion-Vincent, 'Viper-Release Stories', as in n.1 above.
47. Anne Vourc'h, 'Représentations de l'animal et perceptions sociales de sa réintroduction: le cas du lynx des Vosges', paper presented at the conference 'Réintroductions et soutiens de populations d'espèces animales', St. Jean du Gard, 1988.
48. André Micoud, Philippe Labeyrie and Catherine Chantrel, *Les Animaux dits 'nuisibles': Essai sur l'évolution récente d'une notion* (Saint-Etienne, Research sponsored by SRETIE/MERE 88-050, CRESAL, 1989).
49. Delort, *op. cit.* in n.35; Pincemaille, *op. cit.* in n.35.
50. Barloy, 'Rumeurs ...', as in n.10; Bruno Soulier, *Le loup dans l'imaginaire contemporain du Gévaudan* (Montpellier, Université Paul Valéry—Montpellier 3, 1988).
51. Bernard Heuvelmans, personal communication, July 1990.
52. Lesueur, *op. cit.* in n.27; Maurice Soutif, 'Dans la gueule des loups', *Géo* 106 (Dec. 1987), 142-59.

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

53. Lesueur, *op. cit.* in n.27.
54. Gérard Ménatory, *La vie des loups* (Paris, Stock, *Collection Nature,* 1990).
55. François de Beaufort, 'La réintroduction du loup en France', paper presented at the conference at St. Jean du Gard, December 1988.
56. André Micoud, *Production et diffusion des normes de régulation de la faune sauvage en France: le cas du piégeage* (Saint-Etienne, research sponsored by CNRS/ATP PIREN CRESAL, 1990).
57. Micoud, Labeyrie and Chantrel, *op. cit.* in n.48.
58. Digard, *op. cit.* in n.42.
59. *Ibid.,* p. 236.
60. *Ibid.,* p. 237.
61. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1968; first published 1962).
62. Edmund R. Leach, 'Anthropological Aspects of Language: Animal Categories and Verbal Abuse', in Eric H. Lenneberg (ed.), *New Directions in the Study of Language* (Cambridge, Mass., The M.I.T. Press, 1964), pp. 23-63.
63. Angus K. Gillespie and Jay Mechling (eds.), *American Wildlife in Symbol and Story* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1987).
64. François Terrasson, *La peur de la nature* (Paris, Seup de la Terre, 1988).
65. *France-Soir,* 8 Dec. 1989.
66. *International Herald Tribune,* 26 April 1989.
67. François de Beaufort, 'Les manipulations de faune: concepts et critères scientifiques: définitions; protocoles d'évaluation', *C.R. de la Société de Biogéographie* 59 (1983), 295-313; Jacques Lecomte, 'Introduire, réintroduire, voilà la question', *Courrier de la cellule environnement* 6 (Jan. 1989), 21-32.

This content downloaded from 62.122.76.45 on Mon, 16 Jun 2014 00:48:24 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions